

# UNIT 30

## Can, could, may, and would: requests, permission, offers, and invitations

### a Asking people to do things (requests)



We often use **can** or **could** when we ask someone to do something:

- Can** you wait a moment, please?
- Ann, **can** you do me a favor?
- Excuse me. **Could** you tell me how to get to the bus station?
- Do you think you could** lend me some money?
- I wonder if you could** help me.

We also use **would** to ask someone to do something:

- Ann, **would** you do me a favor?
- Would** you wait here, please?

### b To ask for something you can say **Can I have ... ? / Could I have ... ? / May I have ... ?**:

- (in a gift shop) **Can I have** these postcards, please?
- (at the dinner table) **Could I have** the salt, please?

### c Asking for and giving permission

We often use **can**, **could**, or **may** to ask permission to do something:

- (on the telephone) Hello, **can I** speak to Tom, please?
- "**Could I** use your telephone?" "Yes, of course."
- "**Do you think I could** borrow your bicycle?" "Yes, help yourself."
- "**May I** come in?" "Yes, please do."

To give permission, we use **can** or **may** (but **not could**):

- You **can** (or **may**) smoke if you like.

### d We sometimes use **can** or **may** when we offer to do things. (**May** is more formal.):

- "**Can I get you** a cup of coffee?" "That's very nice of you."
- (in a store) "**May I help you**, ma'am?" "No thank you. I'm being helped."

### e For offering and inviting we use **Would you like ... ?** (not do you like):

- **Would you like** a cup of coffee? (not do you like)
- **Would you like to go** to the movies with us tomorrow evening? (not do you like to come)

**I'd like** (= **I would like**) is a polite way of saying what you want or what you want to do:

- **I'd like** some information about hotels, please.
- **I'd like to try** on this jacket, please.

## UNIT 30 Exercises

### 30.1 Read the situation and write what you would say. Use the words given in parentheses (...).

*Example:* You've got a \$20 bill, and you need some change. You ask somebody to help you.  
(Can you ... ?) *Can you change a \$20 bill?*

1. You want to borrow your friend's camera. What do you say to him/her? (Could I ... ?)
2. You have a car and you want to give somebody a lift. What do you say? (Can I ... ?)
3. You have to go to the airport, but you don't know how to get there. You ask a passerby. (Could you ... ?)
4. You are telephoning the owner of an apartment that was advertised in a newspaper. You are interested in the apartment, and you want to stop by and see it today. (Do you think I ... ?)
5. You are at a meeting with your boss. You want to smoke a cigarette. What do you ask first? (May I ... ?)
6. You want to leave work early because you have some important things to do. What do you ask your boss? (Do you think I ... ?)
7. You want to invite someone to come and stay with you for the weekend. (Would you like ... ?)
8. The person in the next room has some music on very loud. How do you ask him politely to turn it down? (Do you think you ... ?)

### 30.2 Decide how to say what you want to say.

*Examples:* You have to carry some heavy boxes upstairs. Ask someone to help you.  
*Do you think you could give me a hand with these boxes?*  
A friend has just come to see you in your apartment. Offer him some coffee or tea. *Can I get you some coffee or tea?*

1. You want your friend to show you how to change the film in your camera. What do you say to him/her?
2. You're on a train. The woman next to you has finished reading her newspaper. Now you want to look at it. What do you say?
3. You need a match to light your cigarette. You don't have any, but the man sitting next to you has some. What do you ask him?
4. There is a concert tonight and you are going with some friends. You think Mary would enjoy it too. Invite her.
5. You're in the post office. You want three airmail stamps. What do you say?
6. You are sitting on a crowded bus. There is an old lady standing. Offer her your seat.
7. You are having a party next Saturday. Invite your friend Tim.